

JULY 3, 1980

WASHINGTON, D.C.-

President Carter left for Europe on the morning that I hit town. The television newscast said today that the Vice President is leaving for his vacation. My hotel is just a couple of blocks from the White House and the Executive Office Building. I am real interested to see how all these government workers act when both bosses are gone. If they are as active in their offices as they are on the streets and sidewalks, the chief executives will be back home before they get slowed down.

My son, a law student here, is my guide. We've been doing so much sightseeing that our shirt collars have skid marks on them. The muscles in my neck are so sore and tender, I feel like I've been calling an international ping-pong match.

Our main points of interest so far have been the museums and the art galleries. An outfit called the Smithsonian Institution has a monopoly on that business.

In 1846, an Englishman named Smithson left a half-million dollars to endow what has turned out to be a treasure of history and science. One of the brochures said that Mr. Smithson left all that money without ever even visiting the United States. I suppose the reason he did that was to pay back for the British burning Washington in 1812. Folks that are so high-tea and so highly civilized as the English are supposed to be probably have a conscience. Whatever his intentions were, he sure gave us a push toward having an interesting capital.

One thing I do advise against seeing is the stuffed whale and elephant in the Museum of Natural History, or at least saving those two huge specimens until you are ready to go home. After we saw the eight-ton elephant and the 35-ton blue whale, nothing looked big anymore except the Washington Monument. I lost my fear of the crowds and stopped giving ground to ladies with their high heels. My sense of perspective was so bad that I took two serious spikes to my arches. The corncob pipe that I smoke will normally open the lanes; however as pollution has increased in the cities, smoke screens don't offer the protection they once did.

For back-up support to my son, I am also using our Representative from our district to see the town. His office provided passes to tour a portion of the White House. On the morning our tickets were valid, the other 433 Congressmen had each issued about a hundred of these V.I.P. passes per district. Supposing that my estimate is right then it was my privilege to stand in line with 43,300 head of the most important visitors in Washington.

The numbers on the passes were 1701 and 1702 which is a pretty high rank in a district as large as ours. I wore my ticket stub in my hat band the rest of the day in hopes I'd see one of those big shot reporters on a Texas daily that's always snickering about farm journalists. I'd have worn it the next day, too, but my son said I'd better leave my hat in the room as somebody might steal a hat that belonged to such an important person. I guess he gets those funny ideas from staying in the city too much.

I should confess, however, that this particular Congressman rates plenty high in my books. He comes from a German community right off the east edge of the Shortgrass Country. The good feature of his people is that they are hard working and so careful with

their money that they don't adapt easily to wasting the taxpayers' money in the grand manner that most politicians develop the first 20 minutes after they are sworn into office.

Being an aide in Mr. Ford's administration and being elected to Congress hasn't changed the values of his boyhood. Like yesterday when he took us to lunch in the Senate and House dining room, he recommended the bean soup before we'd had a chance to read the menu. I sure respect a guy that thinks that fast.

Voting is such an innocent act in Mertz on a familiar polling place staffed by people you've known for 40 years. The outcome of an election doesn't mean so much if all you have to do after the polls close is to mark off your losers and throw the yard sign in the trash. But that innocence changes in D.C. when you see these fellows scurrying around free to do as they please. I wonder how it ever worked, but it has.

I am going to bring the pass to the White House home as a souvenir. From the looks of the crowds outside the hotel, I may need it just to get on a plane.